

Social Justice Perspectives

Hmong History and LGBTQ Lives: Immigrant Youth Perspectives on Being Queer and Hmong

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Abstract: This article highlights some of the cultural barriers that exist for Hmong people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ), while placing these barriers in an historical context. It uncovers differences and similarities found between the experiences of queer Hmong youth and the larger population of queer youth living in the United States. Despite the perception that a traditional Hmong culture holds no place for queer Hmong Americans, individuals are finding spaces for acceptance and slowly moving the larger Hmong community to a place of understanding and tolerance. A vital part of this movement is Shades of Yellow (SOY), an organization that supports queer Hmong. The life stories of three of its members inform this study, offering a more nuanced look at the experiences of queer Hmong living in the Midwest. Though few social studies researchers have broached this topic, the new social historians of the 1960s, who centered their research on broad social movements and the contributions of those formerly excluded from the grand historical narrative of progress, opened the door to this conversation within the field.

Key words: LGBTQ, social justice, Hmong, queer studies, tolerance and social studies

When I arrived in Minnesota in August 2005, I had never heard of the Hmong people, their rich cultural heritage, or their struggle over many years to find a geographic home. Even their significant contributions to the United States armed forces as part of the Secret Army during the Vietnam War was unknown to me. Despite having a love for American History, history/teaching degrees from a reputable university, and years of middle school social studies teaching experience, knowledge of the Hmong had escaped me. After approximately a year of living in one of Minnesota's largest cities, I met and befriended a young Hmong man who had moved here from the South just as I had. I had moved here to teach at the local university, and Thomas¹ had moved here because he desired to live in a Hmong community where his gay identity would be recognized and validated. Shades of Yellow (SOY) had been recently founded by another gay male member of the Hmong community, to support lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) Hmong people living in this area. Loosely organized, information about SOY was spread mainly by word of mouth and discreet community networking.

Seven years have passed since I was first introduced to SOY and members are now much more open about their membership and organizing efforts. Still, SOY remains the only LGBTQ Hmong support group in the world and stands as an organization with strong community connections to other local gay and lesbian support groups. I had stumbled across a group of Asian Americans that had heretofore been unknown to me, a sub-group within the Hmong community that

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struggled to gain recognition and acceptance, while sincerely working to stay connected to their families and to the larger Hmong community.

Thomas' experiences—coming to terms with his gay identity, coming out, facing racism, fearing rejection from family and friends—and the challenges/triumphs of other members of SOY living within this local Hmong community, in combination with the history of Hmong people, inform social studies teachers who wish to present powerful lessons on significant social studies themes like culture, diversity, social justice, and citizenship. This article provides a brief history of the Hmong people and the challenges faced by lesbian and gay Hmong youth, in the larger context of LGBTQ youth in schools in general. Teens' expectations have clashed with unfortunate realities of fear, disappointment, and the necessity of maintaining dual identities. The history of the Hmong people and the specific stories of the gay Hmong youth presented here exemplify perspectives that have largely gone unrepresented in our social studies literature. The lessons learned from them have strong implications for our field.

History of the Hmong

The social studies literature is virtually silent about the Hmong, their cultural heritage, and their contributions to United States History. An overview of the history of the Hmong people identifies who they are and traces their various movements across Southeast Asia to their eventual migration to the United States.

Who are the Hmong?

The Hmong are an ethnic minority group that some scholars believe can be traced as far back as 2700 BC in the Yellow River region of China. In fact, King Chi You, a legendary king prominent in Chinese history, is believed to have been Hmong. Linguistic records tie the Hmong to this region of China as well. After occupying this region for centuries, many Hmong began to migrate out of China to Laos, Northern Vietnam, and Thailand in the late 18th century. Most Hmong Americans, in fact, trace their recent ancestry to Laos (Yang, 2008). This migration continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In the 1940s, anti-Japanese resistance in Laos was led by Hmong leader Touby Lyfoung. Later, he won legislative elections from his region and eventually reached the status of Vice President of the Laotian National Assembly, the first of the Hmong minority to reach this level of prominence. After the Communist takeover of Laos in 1975, Lyfoung was arrested and sent to a labor camp along the Vietnamese border where he died in 1979. Vang Pao joined the anti-Japanese movement led by Lyfoung at a very young age and later fought alongside the French against the Viet Minh until Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam were granted independence from France in 1954. A few years later in 1961, Vang Pao met with American military officials and members of the CIA to form a secret alliance between the Hmong living in Laos and American operatives fighting Communists from the North, who were led by Ho Chi Minh. This Hmong/American partnership began what is known as the Secret War in Laos that lasted from 1963-1975. It is estimated that between thirty and forty thousand Hmong lost their lives during this conflict. Vang Pao was evacuated to Thailand in 1975 with assistance from the United

States, but thousands of his followers were left behind. Communist leaders in Laos announced their plan to wipe out those Hmong who remained.

Hmong Migration to the United States

The withdrawal of American troops from Southeast Asia during the 1970s prompted a mass exodus of the Hmong as well, and many Hmong refugee camps were established in Thailand. The largest and best known of these camps was Ban Vinai. By the mid-1970s, Hmong refugees were allowed to enter other countries, including Australia, Canada, and France, but the vast majority came to the United States.

They began arriving in the United States by the thousands, and by 1979 over 27,000 Hmong had been allowed to cross our borders (Yang, 2008). By 1990 the number of Hmong living in the United States had risen to 94,000, a number that increased to over 209,000 by 2006, and to just over 260,000 by 2010 (Hmong American Partnership, n.d.) (See <http://www.hmong.org/default.aspx>). A subsidiary of the Hmong American Partnership in Washington D. C. called Hmong National Development, Inc. (n.d.) corroborates these numbers. Some agencies estimate the true number of Hmong living in the United States to be even higher. Language barriers and fear of discrimination from holding minority status may have prevented many from listing Hmong as their ethnic identity on official 2010 census counts.

The West and Midwest (California and Minnesota, specifically) boast the largest Hmong populations in the United States, with the largest concentration of Hmong people in a single metropolitan area being the large Midwestern city of St. Paul. In some of St. Paul's schools over one-third of the student populations are Hmong or Hmong American.

Hmong Culture

Yang (2008) reports that Hmong culture is patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal, which means that men are considered the head of the family, men typically have more power than women, familial lines are traced through men, and when Hmong couples marry they often live with the husband's family.

Hmong traditional religion has been reported as either animism or shamanism, but is "more a holistic combination of both" (p. 1). Given the presence of Christian missionaries in Southeast Asia and the influence of large churches that assisted Hmong migration to the United States, many Hmong identify as Christian. But the percentage that practice Christianity and/or some combination of animism or shamanism is unclear.

Concerning sexual orientation, "gay men and lesbians have had no place in Hmong history, culture, or literature" (p. 2). In fact, there is no direct translation for the words gay or lesbian in the Hmong language. This linguistic reality denies the existence of lesbian and gay Hmong people in their home countries, or at the very least, sends the message that there is no room for gays and lesbians in traditional Hmong culture (Yang, 2008). For those Hmong and Hmong

American individuals who identify as LGBTQ, this lack of acknowledgment carries with it a heavy burden.

Social Education Perspectives

The new social historians of the 1960s centered their research on broad social movements and the contributions of those formerly excluded from the grand historical narrative of progress. Though the histories of African Americans and women changed the most dramatically during the two decades that followed (Symcox, 2002), current research into the lives of LGBT and queer people exemplifies a continuation of this movement that represents voices that “once uncovered could not easily be folded into the comfortable traditional narrative of a shared and glorious past” (Ibid., p. 32). The type of research practiced by the new social historians lives on and is exemplified by Crocco (2001) and Thornton’s (2003) call that explicitly implicates social studies teachers and researchers for their complicity in continuing the silence about LGBT people, themes, and topics within the social studies literature. For example, though curricular materials have devoted considerable attention to the treatment of Afghan women under Taliban rule given their “harsh, extremist brand of Islam,” there has been “no such condemnation of systematic persecution of gay men (or allegedly gay men) in parts of the Islamic world … although, as with Afghan women, the persecution rests on these men simply for being who they are” (Thornton, 2003, p. 227). Thornton continues;

Teachers have choices. All teachers are curricular-instructional gatekeepers—they largely decide the day-to-day curriculum and activities [that] students experience. How teachers enact curriculum, even with today’s constraints such as standards and high-stakes tests, still matters both practically and ethically. Opportunities to incorporate at least some gay material into the standard curriculum exist; in many instances, all that is required is the will to call attention to aspects of standard subject matter that heretofore went unmentioned. (Thornton, 2003, p. 228)

This article addresses the little known contributions of the Hmong people during the Vietnam War era, while simultaneously responding to Thornton’s (2003) call to include more LGBTQ people in the collective body of social studies literature. A review of the literature revealed only one social studies researcher who discussed the contributions of the Hmong people in peer-reviewed journal articles and one recent book where the Hmong are given thorough consideration. This review corroborates earlier findings indicating that social studies literature lacks LGBTQ-themed materials (Mayo, 2012). These few examples (below) from the literature along with the contributions of the new social historians and the work of Thornton provide the conceptual framework for this article.

Teaching History with Film (Marcus, et al., 2010) “provide[s] a fresh, engaging, and clear overview of teaching with film to effectively enhance social studies instruction.” The book presents cases of experienced teachers to uncover dynamic, effective teaching through the use of movies. Of special importance to this study is one teacher who used various films in a history and anthropology unit to introduce an ethno-history of the Hmong. Citing numerous objectives for this particular unit, the authors concluded that “among the most important [objectives] is

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humanizing an often marginalized and misunderstood people, and doing so by using assignments that ask students to adopt a Hmong perspective" (p. 46). The various films used include *Between Two Worlds: The Hmong Shaman in America* (1984), *The Killing Fields* (1984), and *The Split Horn: Life of a Hmong Shaman in America* (2001). They helped students to learn more about the Hmong and their culture. "In turn, this awareness helps students to develop respect, tolerance, and eventually care about and for the Hmong" (*Ibid.*).

McCall (1997, 1999) also turned to a form of the arts to demonstrate and teach about Hmong culture. Through a study of Hmong *paj ntaub*—artistic creations that express Hmong culture through stories and designs on clothing and everyday items—and the women skilled in these arts, McCall called attention to the scant use of the visual arts in comparison with the emphasis on integrating literature into the social studies curriculum (p. 138). Citing research that encourages social studies educators to use art such as paintings, because "art may provide a more direct and powerful form of communication than verbal messages for children" (p. 140), McCall concluded that for young children, the visual images of Hmong everyday life in Laos depicted on story cloth, a type of *paj ntaub*, provided background knowledge in a more memorable manner than verbal explanations did alone. The use of textile arts also demonstrates McCall's commitment to including women's voices in the social studies curriculum because [textile arts] "are typically viewed as a craft and less valuable than male-dominated painting and sculpture" (p. 141). Later, McCall revealed how story cloths became a means for recording aspects of Hmong history and culture that was comprehensible to a wider audience. Among other historic and/or cultural scenes, they showed the agricultural lifestyle among the Hmong while living in Laos, and they showed the disruption of Hmong lives caused by the Vietnam War, the turmoil endured during the escape from Laos to Thailand, and images of life in the refugee camps. Though McCall "developed a greater respect for and understanding of the Hmong's dedication to maintaining their cultural identity through creating *paj ntaub*" (p. 161), she never once mentions the existence of Hmong who identify as gay or lesbian. Just as no word for gay exists in their language, the absence of queer Hmong on the story cloth indicates their invisibility and the complete erasure of these people's lives.

Case Study

This case study began as a result of the friendship built between Thomas and me. He was eager to reach out to groups and individuals who were allies, and I was equally interested in learning more about his story. Not only was I being introduced to a culture heretofore unknown to me, but I was also becoming an ally to the only LGBTQ support group of its kind for Hmong people. In October 2006, I invited Thomas to be a speaker at a university event called Diversity Dialogues. At these monthly presentations, individuals or groups would come in to talk about a particular facet of diversity in the hopes of raising awareness and starting conversations across the multiple cultures represented in the audience. While informal, these dialogues often raised important issues for faculty and students to consider following the presentation time. Thomas agreed to come in and share about his life as a young gay Hmong man and how SOY had played an important role in the process of negotiating his gay identity. He also shared his strong desire to remain connected to family and the larger Hmong community. Following this presentation,

Thomas invited me to a SOY meeting so that I could meet other members of the group. I was humbled by this gesture of friendship and willingly accepted the invitation. Though I shared Thomas's queer identity, it was a privilege to receive this invitation given my status as an outsider.

Over the next several months, I attended SOY meetings and Thomas introduced me to other members of the group. This allowed me to meet and befriend seven members of SOY. The vast majority of the members identified as gay and male. They were between 21 and 26 years of age. I participated in Hmong New Year celebrations and was even asked to be a judge for the 2007 Miss SOY Pageant, a celebration of art and dance culminating with the crowning of a young man or woman who best presented her/his talent in a lavish drag show. Participating in these community activities helped me to earn the trust of the SOY members, and so I asked if they would consider sharing more about their experiences as gay Hmong youth, living in the metropolitan area that had become a key site of Hmong immigration.

Thomas and two other SOY members, Kaim and Teeb² agreed to be interviewed. Each interview lasted between 60-90 minutes, with two of the interviews taking place in my office and the other in a local coffee shop, locations agreed upon by the participants. Each interview centered on four core questions: 1) What childhood memories stand out that indicated to you that you were different from the other boys in your community and possibly gay? 2) How would you describe your coming out process? 3) What did you hope to change about your life by moving to this area and joining Shades of Yellow? 4) What are your hopes for the future in terms of living freely as an openly gay individual in your community? Individual participants were asked follow-up questions depending upon their responses to these foundational questions. All three interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and then sent to the participants via electronic mail for verification purposes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Yin (2009) defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon, set within its real-world context—especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). The case study method was used to capture the impressions and experiences of three individual Hmong youth who identify as gay. Simultaneously, activities, behaviors, and dispositions displayed by the larger group of SOY members were observed. By no means do these three individuals speak for the whole LGBTQ Hmong community, but their insights offer a slice of the overall experience described by others in various contexts.

Case study methodology was useful because the goals for this study were to investigate what challenges existed for the handful of gay Hmong men who participated in SOY and how their experiences compared to other gay Hmong youth and gay youth in general. The study focused on specific incidents shared by these Hmong men vis a vis their negotiated life experiences within the larger Hmong community.

These specific memories and stories recorded over a period of six months, combined with my personal interactions within the larger LGBTQ Hmong community, compose the bounded case of

the study (Tellis, 1997; Yin, 2012)—what is covered by this study and what is outside of its scope (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Given the countless interactions among the participants in this study and within the larger Hmong and LBTQ Hmong communities during this specific six-month timeframe, many other units of inquiry could have been explored. The participants' actions and memories speak to how other members of the Hmong LGBTQ community make sense of their lived experience, and may lead to a greater understanding of the similarities and differences found between the experiences of LGBTQ Hmong and queer youth in general (Yin, 2012).

Findings

Family/Economic Pressures and Academic Success

The large concentration of Hmong people in various metropolitan areas enables them to maintain strong cultural traditions, including the practice of marriage rituals and religious ceremonies. In addition, many Hmong households do not speak English, which presents challenges for the children attending local schools. Ngo (2010) found that Hmong and other Southeast Asian youth feel tremendous pressure to provide economic assistance to their families while in high school, and some worked an average of 20-30 hours per week. This money was used to buy food for the family and clothes for younger (and sometimes older) siblings. Hmong teens also felt pressure to attend family and clan gatherings and participate in important cultural rituals on the weekends, sometimes in communities far away. This time reduced the available academic work time for assignments outside of class. Though these findings are not limited to LGBTQ Hmong youth, they, like their heterosexual peers, face similar family obligations. Indeed, Teeb has dropped out of school and works in a local machine shop to earn money for his family. Working part-time while going to school proved to be too much, and he opted to help supplement the family income rather than moving forward with his education.

Immigrant and LGBT Identities

For those immigrant teens that identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or queer, their experiences in school are even more complex. In part, this complexity is fueled by the expectation that living in the United States will allow them to explore their sexual orientation to a higher degree than was possible in their home country. Kato (1998) identifies several challenges and fears faced by gay immigrant teens in the United States. The most prevalent of these fears are returning to home countries that are less gay, lesbian, or bisexual-friendly and the difficulties associated with remaining in the United States with a gay or lesbian partner, given the lack of legal recognition of gay marriages in most states across this country. According to Kato, some immigrant teens fear that information about them will travel home, given the wide use of the World Wide Web and the Internet. For others, the subtle racism and cultural disconnects they discovered are huge disappointments. One student in Minnesota commented;

Cross-racial relationships ... are relatively rare [here]. Most white people are not attracted to minorities, especially those around college age. For me, that created a sense of racial embarrassment that persisted for a while.... That has been hardest for

me to adjust [to].... It's not outright racism, because people have multiracial friends, it's only [that] attraction across racial lines is absent or very much reduced.

Like other immigrant youth, Hmong immigrants face language barriers, difficult negotiations between familial and school expectations, and cultural disconnects, all of which are fairly common challenges. For those Hmong teens that also identify as LGBT or queer, however, there is an added layer to the challenges they face. The concept of homosexuality is viewed as a Western construct, although gay Hmong boys may act out gender non-conforming behaviors throughout childhood without altering the expectation that they will grow up to marry and father children. As Thomas shared with me during one of our many conversations:

When I was a kid growing up in North Carolina, I knew that I was different. I wore a tiara, and often wore my sister's dresses and shoes around the house. Whenever we played house, I was the mom. I was flamboyant, and my parents saw me. Still, they would tell me about getting married when I grew up and the importance of having children.

Thomas' parents expected him to marry and have children despite the outward signs he displayed growing up, that he might identify as a gay male. Boulden (2009) uncovered similar pressures among his gay Hmong American participants who felt compelled to marry (women), have children, and protect the reputation of the family and the clan. The expectations placed upon Thomas persisted until he came out to his parents when he was seventeen. Indeed, it was the naming of being gay that forced his parents to consider that he needed an alternative way of being in terms of his sexual orientation. In Thomas' case, his parents have come to accept him as the individual he has become over the last eight years. But for others, the outcome has been quite different.

Kaim and Teeb immigrated to Minnesota from Thailand in 2005. Both entered a large metropolitan school district in Minnesota, and both identify as gay. They joined SOY soon after coming to Minnesota, and hoped to explore new possibilities of sexual freedom in this new place. What they found, instead, is complete resistance to their way of being and rejection from fellow Hmong teens. On a popular Hmong website, HmongBlog.com, they have been exposed to threats of violence and physical harm from other local Hmong students. In fact, they both report fearing for their lives if it became common knowledge in the Hmong community that they are gay. This added stress has caused these young men to deny any open connection to the gay and lesbian community. "We have to be 'straight' at school and only feel comfortable being 'out' when we have SOY meetings in my apartment or at a [gay] friend's house." Fear of being hurt prevented Kaim from attending the Hmong New Year celebration in the community, and neither he nor Teeb plan on coming out to their parents for fear of bringing shame on the family. Sadly, these young men who identify as gay plan to marry women at some time in the future. Another recent immigrant to Minnesota and member of SOY came to the United States with his wife, while simultaneously (and secretly) exploring his sexual orientation with men. According to Kaim, "There is no other way [for us] to be."

These cases addressing the lives of three queer Hmong youth in a Midwestern, metropolitan area raise serious questions about the pressures faced by students in our classrooms. Immigrant youth face challenges regardless of their sexual orientation, but for those youth who also identify as LGBTQ, the challenges are far greater. They fear dishonoring or being abandoned by their family members and the larger Hmong community, and they fear for their personal safety. For two of the three participants in this study, it is clearly not safe for them to be gay and Hmong.

Discussion

Given the absence of LGBTQ people in Hmong history and in the Hmong language, combined with the patriarchal cultural norms of many Hmong communities, it would be easy to support a narrative that describes Hmong culture as traditional, and queer Hmong as “victims” who must overcome a plethora of hardships to survive. In their study of queer transnational migrants, Mattheis & Figueroa (2012) found that many of their participants described their home communities as unsupportive or hostile to LGBTQ identities. Surely there are hardships that individuals must endure, and one cannot negate those very real experiences where people literally live in fear of bodily harm or death if it becomes known that they are gay. As two of the participants in this study have indicated, gay Hmong youth have gone to great lengths to cover or hide their gay identity in order to spare the family shame or dishonor, including going forward with the marriage ritual. Queer Hmong youth have been physically threatened in person and online, and some live in fear of being abandoned by loved ones. But this is not the whole story. This often-told narrative must be carefully re-examined so that a more complete telling of the story moves forward.

Yang (2008) reported that despite the apparent non-existence of gay Hmong before they immigrated to the United States, there are “anecdotal stories” about gay and lesbian Hmong in Laos. The term gay was not used, but she recounts one family’s experience with a woman who “behaved like a man” (p. 3). There are also stories about Hmong men and women who never married, indicating the possibility of same-sex attraction. Recall that Thomas reported that he always knew he was different. He was a flamboyant child who wore a tiara and his sister’s shoes, and enjoyed the role of mom when playing house. Likewise, Ngo (2012b) reports that the mother of one of her male participants did not see him as a boy, but rather as a girl in some sense. She never understood the word gay. These behaviors, while not the norm in these Hmong families, are not unique. They indicate a continuum of behaviors reported anecdotally from Hmong individuals in the past.

Another part of the story that must be problematized is the coming out narrative. For many Americans, coming out represents an individual’s acknowledgment of their queer identity and the desire to stop hiding an important part of what makes that individual whole. Though individuals who come out may endure negative consequences, the coming out process is most-often viewed as a liberating experience.

But as Ngo (2012b) explains, “researchers of Asian and Asian American LGBT experiences find that the focus of coming out discourses on individual identity and development fails to take into

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account the central importance of family social relations and expectations." Further, Aoki, Ngin, Mo, and Ja (1989) reveal that in many Asian and Asian American communities, a person is not simply viewed as an individual, but as a representative of the family and must maintain a public reputation that is positive. Coming out as LGBTQ has serious repercussions not only for the individual, but for the entire family as well. Therefore, it is significant to note that despite the many pressures to remain closeted, some queer Hmong youth are coming out *and* finding support among family members.

For Thomas, his mother has shown support for him and the entire Hmong LGBTQ community by participating in Pride parades and attending SOY New Year celebrations. This kind of support is particularly significant given the traditional and conservative reputation of the Hmong American community. It indicates that older Hmong adults are "capable of shifting their stance on complex issues from positions as harsh critics to that of staunch allies" (Kumashiro, 1999; Ngo, 2012a). Changes in individual attitudes result in dynamic actions within the larger community. Hmong American beliefs about the queer youth among them are not monolithic. Individually and collectively, perceptions of the various LGBTQ communities are evolving. SOY is helping to reshape perceptions of queer Hmong and Southeast Asian youth just as gay straight alliances (GSAs) have supported queer youth in schools in the United States since the early 1990s. Though many challenges remain for queer youth in schools—verbal harassment, feeling [and being] unsafe at school, increased levels of depression, and decreased levels of self-esteem, to name a few (Kosciw, et al., 2012)—they are only part of a much more complex story. Queer youth endure hardships in school and in life, but they also enjoy triumphs and overcome difficulties on a daily basis. Just as being out at school is related to victimization, being out also results in higher levels of psychological well being (*Ibid*). LGBTQ youth cannot be viewed simply as victims. To adopt that point of view robs these young people of the rich, nuanced lives they experience daily and perpetuates stereotypes that are unhealthy for us all.

Conclusions & Educational Implications

This study raises questions about the multiple identities our students carry with them each day, at home and at school. Though its focus is on challenges and triumphs experienced by one small part of the larger LGBTQ and immigrant communities, this study reveals the complexity that accompanies many queer students' lives. Issues of race, gender, and socio-economic and immigrant status collide in various ways and play out differently for each of the individuals involved. Coming out stories vary greatly; students' commitments to family and community are multiple; and the dual realities of immigrant/LGBTQ identification complicate students' lives. Teachers, guidance counselors, and parents need to constantly remind themselves about the complex lives their students/children live so that they can provide the resources and support these students need. Further, the adults in school are responsible for helping all other students navigate the tricky terrain presented when they engage in relationships with their LGBTQ and/or immigrant peers. Advisors of GSAs and other diversity club leaders may play a particularly important role in this endeavor.

All classroom teachers must recognize the importance of using culturally relevant curricular materials in their normal classroom routine. In addition, they must be willing to work with parent and community partnerships to ensure the well being of their students. Social studies teachers in particular can serve as leaders in this effort by creating and implementing curriculum that includes diverse histories and perspectives, so that all students see themselves in the lessons being taught. Thornton (2003) tells us that no special expertise is required to accomplish this goal, just the willingness to provide information that is already available. And readily available online resources can help teachers to develop more inclusive lesson/unit plans (See Teacher Resources for Inclusive Classrooms). This commitment to a more inclusive curriculum combined with dedicated efforts to understand students' multiple identities will result in meeting the need for education and action in our diverse communities.

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Notes

¹This name and others used to present the views of the members of Shades of Yellow are all pseudonyms. "Thomas" was used because he uses a name commonly considered American.

²The other two participants were given Hmong pseudonyms out of respect for their given Hmong names.

Resources for Inclusive Classrooms

American Civil Liberties Union: LGBT Youth & Schools
<http://www.aclu.org/lgbt-rights/lgbt-youth-schools>

Gay Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
<http://www.glsen.org>

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Ground Spark, Respect for All Project
<http://groundspark.org/respect-for-all>

Hmong Homepage
www.hmongnet.org

Hmong Studies Journal
www.hmongstudies.org

Human Rights Campaign
<http://www.hrc.org/>

Multicultural Pavilion
<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/>

People with a History: An Online Guide to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Trans* History
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/>

Rethinking Schools
<http://www.rethinkingschools.org>

Shades of Yellow (SOY)
<http://www.shadesofyellow.org/>

The New York Times Learning Network: Teaching and Learning about Gay History and Issues
<http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11/22/teaching-and-learning-about-gay-history-and-issues/>

The Safe Schools Coalition
<http://safeschoolscoalition.org>